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# GREECE, BULGARIA AND THE PRINCIPLE OF NATIONALITY

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## I.

EASTERN peoples delight in didactic tales. Two such, generally known in the Balkans, give a graphic picture of the Bulgarians.

According to the first, God said to a Bulgarian one day, "Ask of me whatever you wish, and I will do it for you; but I shall do twice as much for your neighbor." The Bulgarian, without hesitation, put out one of his own eyes.

This anecdote was repeated in 1895 by a Bulgarian Cabinet Minister to the well-known French sociologist, Alfred Berl, who in his turn narrated it recently, saying that Bulgaria preferred to ally herself with the empires of prey in the hope of bringing about the destruction of Serbia and Greece rather than join the Entente whose victory would have brought, to be sure, much profit to Bulgaria, but even more to Serbia and to Greece.

The second tale runs as follows: Once a Bulgarian and a Greek entered into a partnership. They acquired three lambs. When the time came to divide up, the Bulgarian said: "The first lamb belongs to me by right; the second you will give me because I am your partner and you love me; and the third I take away from you because I am stronger."

This anecdote was time and again told by the Greeks among themselves in the Spring of 1913, between the first and second Balkan Wars, when the Bulgarians were advancing their claims upon Central Macedonia on the ground of nationality; upon Southern Macedonia for commercial reasons; and upon Thrace by virtue of their victories at Loule-Bourgas.

There was a special argument invented for Saloniki—one of a religious nature.

This metropolis had reared the Greek orthodox monks Cyril and Methodius, who gave Christianity to the Bulgarians. Ex-King Ferdinand, himself a Roman Catholic, did not hesitate to make capital of this argument. At a dinner given by the late King George in Saloniki he said to Queen Olga, the consort of his host, "Madam, Saloniki is the Mecca of the Bulgarians." Now, in this modern Mecca, the number of the Faithful was not even half of one per cent. Imagine Greece claiming Tarsus on the ground that Saint Paul, who evangelized the Greeks, came from there!

The tale of the three lambs constantly recurs to my mind as I become conversant with the arguments put forth by the Bulgarian propagandists who are active in this country.

The basis of all pro-Bulgar activity here is the contention that the Treaty of Bucharest was a violation of the principle of nationality, especially so in having awarded to Serbia the districts of Ochrida, Veles and Ishtip, in Central Macedonia.

The Serbians and their friends have retorted that this population is Slav, and Serbian rather than Bulgarian, in language as well as in customs, and that if a generation ago it adhered to the Bulgarian exarchate, it did so on orders from Russia, then the Great Slav Power, whose policy aimed at the creation of a Greater Bulgaria.

It is curious to note that the Serbs have failed to bring out the inconsistency of the Bulgarians, who while complaining that the Treaty of Bucharest violates the principle of nationality by surrendering to Serbia what they call Bulgarian populations, have, nevertheless, in utter disregard of this principle, occupied, under provisions of the same treaty, lands inhabited almost exclusively by Greeks and Turks.

The Greeks have been laboring under the error of thinking that the whole world was following closely the events in the East. They have not, therefore, tried to show that the Treaty of Bucharest, far from having given them more than they were entitled to on the principle of nationality, imposed upon them the obligation of yielding Gre-

cian territories which they had liberated with their own sword.

## II.

The Bulgarian propagandists, when speaking of Greek Macedonia, artfully conceal the fact that Greece was not given Macedonia in its entirety, but only its southern parts. In fact, at some places, as in the region north of Saloniki, the Greek boundaries run only a few tens of miles from the sea. Now, in the course of long centuries of struggle between Greeks and Bulgarians, the latter never took Saloniki, nor did they ever succeed in establishing themselves firmly in Southern Macedonia. For this reason, in Greek Macedonia Bulgarians are either altogether absent, or found in trifling minorities.

On the other hand, for centuries, the Greeks had control of Central Macedonia. This explains the Greek character of many cities such as Monastir, Krushevon, Stromnitsa, Melnikon, which are today under either Serbian or under Bulgarian rule.

In January, 1915, Mr. Radoslavoff, the Bulgarian Premier, declared officially to Sir Alfred Sharp that Bulgaria asks from Greece the Eastern Departments of Serres, Drama and Kavalla. This statement is interesting insofar as Bulgarians recognize that they are not entitled to the rest of Greek Macedonia, although it does not indicate the grounds on which the Bulgarian title to Eastern Macedonia is established.

Mr. J. D. Bouchier, who with Mr. Brailsford is the usual mouthpiece of Bulgarian claims before the English-speaking public, was so good as to explain in a recent magazine article that Kavalla should have gone to Bulgaria "for commercial reasons." He does not state, however, what those "commercial reasons" are.

That the principle of nationality is dropped in the case of Eastern Macedonia is easily explained by the well-known fact that in the districts of Drama-Kavalla, Bulgarian nationality may be said not to exist (the Bulgarians constitute one and one-half per cent. of the whole population).

Neither Mr. Radoslavoff, however, nor Mr. Bouchier favors us with an explanation of the grounds on which

Serres is claimed. Surely, it is not on commercial grounds? Is it on ethnological grounds then? If so, how can we explain the burning of Serres by the Bulgarians in 1913, and the almost complete extermination of its inhabitants between the years 1916-1918? The report of the investigation by the University of Athens proves, on the basis of official documents, that when the Bulgarians entered Serres (August, 1916), the population was between 22,000 and 24,000, and that when they fled after their recent defeat (September, 1918), the population had decreased to 3,500. The population which had disappeared died either of starvation, or was deported to Bulgaria where it was decimated by hunger and exhaustion.

The investigation shows that what happened at Serres took place throughout Eastern Macedonia. A great London morning paper summing up the situation declared that the Bulgarians have "outhunned the Huns;" it might have said that they have *outhamided* Sultan Abdul Hamid.

It is not my purpose to enlarge here on the unspeakable Bulgarian atrocities. Americans who wish to learn details may apply to the Interallied International Commission, which has just finished its investigation, or to the members of the American Red Cross Committee, who have been on the spot since the retreat of the Bulgarian army and who have done so much to relieve the terrible sufferings of the unfortunate population.

All that I want to show is that the behavior of the Bulgarians would have been different in Eastern Macedonia if this province had been Bulgarian.

### III.

On the eve of the Treaty of Bucharest, the victorious Greek forces were holding Central Macedonia, east of the Axios (Vardar), and the Aegean coasts of Thrace.

Always loyal to the principle of nationality, Mr. Venizelos declared that he was ready to evacuate Central Macedonia but insisted on keeping Thrace.

In his Memorandum to the Peace Congress of 1919, he states that he was compelled to drop his claim for this province, owing to "strong pressure." This alludes mainly to Russia, which was anxious to keep Greece away from Constantinople, and to Austria, which had already concluded

an alliance with Bulgaria.<sup>1</sup> This explains why, now that Austria and Russia have disappeared, the Congress at Paris has not opposed the Greek claims upon Thrace. The *London Times* was able, as early as the sixth of April, 1919, to announce, on official authority, that the Peace Congress had accepted the boundary proposed by Mr. Venizelos which gives to Greece Thrace, south of the River Arda, on condition that a commercial outlet be given on the Aegean.

If I were aiming only at supporting the claims of my country to this province, it would be unnecessary for me to add anything more, now, when Greece has been given satisfaction on this point. I desire, however, to show that by the Treaty of Bucharest Greece and not Bulgaria was wronged.

According to the official census, in Thrace, where there is a total population of 2,200,646, there are only 112,000 Bulgarians, who are inferior in number not only to the Greeks and the Turks but even to the Armenians. (183, 253). The only regions in which they are somewhat more compact are those north of the River Arda, upon which Greece lays no claim. In the other regions, they are an infinitesimal part (69,000 or three per cent) of the total population.

This numerical weakness the Bulgarians officially admitted in 1912. At that time it became necessary to co-operate, in view of the elections against the Ottomanizing programme of the Committee of Union and Progress. It was agreed between the Greeks and the Bulgarians, under the auspices of the Oecumenical Patriarchate, and the Bulgarian Exarchate, that their coalition in Thrace would support seven Greek candidates as against only one Bulgarian candidate.

The single Bulgarian Deputy provided by the Treaty was to sit for the Northern district. In the region south of the Arda the Bulgarians are numerically so weak that, despite their occupation since 1913, all its deputies to the Sobranie have been Turks. These gentlemen, sixteen in number, on the 31st of December 1919 signed an address to General Franchet d'Esperey, Commander-in-Chief of

<sup>1</sup> The text of the treaty was published recently (March 1919) by the *Journal des Débats*, the leading Paris newspaper. It was signed on September 1913. Yet the Entente was credulous enough to believe until September 1915 that Bulgaria would not attack Serbia!

the Allied armies in the Near East, which may be summarized as follows:

The Mussulman deputies begin by observing "that western Thrace is peopled by Mussulman Turks, a Greek minority *and some Bulgars*." They declare that "it is impossible for their compatriots to live under Bulgarian rule, in view of the entire lack of tolerance on the part of the Bulgars towards all those among their subjects who are not of their own race, and the frequent abuses and vexations practised by the Bulgars which are unworthy of a civilized nation." They indicate that their protests to the Sobranie have but "served to bring about the demolition of the only Turkish mosque which existed in Sofia;" and that, "if the abuses continue and increase, it is not impossible that the latent irritation which is felt in Thrace will break out against the oppressors." Under these circumstances the deputies demand an occupation by Allied troops. They add:

It is desirable that Hellenic troops should participate in this occupation, seeing that the Greeks of Thrace have experienced the same vexations as ourselves; *that the Hellenes have always shown themselves generous towards us, that theirs is a nation with whom we can live on very good terms*, and that they could, at the same time as their allies, protect us from the oppression of the Bulgars.

In a letter of the same date (December 31, 1918) the Turkish deputies ask Mr. Venizelos "to intervene in their behalf in the manner they indicate."

This document proving the Bulgarians accorded no better treatment to the Turks than to the Greeks, had no little influence on the decision by which, in Paris, the Greek claims to Thrace were recognized.

But it must be pointed out that military consideration also, and the desire to avoid new wars in the future, have pleaded in favor of Greece.

Bulgaria's presence in the littoral of Thrace has ever meant the splitting of Hellenism in two, since, by the development of the submarine, the presence of Bulgaria in the Aegean might paralyze Greek mobilization.

It is argued that Thrace should be given to Bulgaria in order to prevent another war. Such a concession will, in fact, be the cause of new conflicts. Let us overlook, for a moment, the persecution of the Greek element under the Bulgarians, and the constant irritation of the Greeks on

this account. Can we also overlook the fact that Hellenism, cut in two, will tend to reunite? Even if the Greeks should give up their rights, the Bulgarians, feeling that their submarines could easily paralyze Greek mobilization, would not resist the temptation to let loose a war in which the initial advantages would all be on their side. None who knows the way Bulgaria entered the war in 1913 and in 1915, will doubt this. The danger of Bulgarian submarines in the Aegean is even greater when we consider that the Bulgarians are in the habit of launching attacks by irregulars, for whose actions they can readily deny all responsibility.<sup>1</sup> A dozen or so submarines, run by *comitadjis*, would be enough to spread disorder in the Greek seas.

Against our overwhelming ethnological strategic and diplomatic arguments, the Bulgarians have been able to oppose only what Mr. Bouchier calls "commercial necessity." But to this ample satisfaction has been given by the offering of a commercial outlet under the auspices of the League of Nations, as mentioned above. Mr. Venizelos, always over-anxious to conciliate the Bulgarians, did not hesitate to give them for such an outlet the choice of Dedeagatch, Kavalla or Saloniki.

A statesman of a less conciliatory temper would have observed that Roumania, a friend and practically an ally of Greece, has not claimed such an outlet, although the Roumanian coast on the Black Sea is one-third as extensive as the Bulgarian one.

He would, moreover, have reminded the Conferences that Bulgaria came into the possession of that stretch of land on the Black Sea, at the expense of Hellenism, as, when it was granted to Bulgaria, it was inhabited almost exclusively by Greeks, to whom the Great Powers then guaranteed special religious and educational autonomy.

This fact is of some importance. The Bulgarians always speak to foreigners of their kinsmen in the Roumanian Dobrudja. But they avoid every reference to the Greeks of the Euxine, included in Bulgaria by the Treaty of Berlin. Their silence on this subject is certainly not to be attributed to their ignorance of the facts. This

<sup>1</sup> In this fashion have they fought the Turks, attacked the Greek army at Pargaon in May 1913, and blown up the bridges on the Vardar (November 1914). This last action coincided with the first great Austrian offensive and was aimed at preventing Greek guns and ammunitions from going to the Serbs. Fortunately the explosion was late.



is how, in December of 1904, a Bulgarian newspaper (*The Coast*) described the situation. I quote from a translation of it which appeared in the *Contemporary Review* of London (September 1905, p. 386) :

From the Rumanian to the Turkish frontier, one finds on the coast of the Black Sea but three Bulgarian settlements: Siavla, St. Nicolas and Kioprou; even the inhabitants of these villages are emigrants from Turkey.

For the rest, the coast is inhabited from Kavarna to Varna by Greeks speaking Turkish, but nonetheless fanatic and ready to volunteer for the Hellenic navy. From Varna to Pyrgos the littoral is Greek, with the exclusion of Galata, which is a Turkish village. Messivria and Anchialos are purely Greek cities. The Bulgarian schools of Anchialos cost 25,000 francs per annum and contain five pupils. The remainder of the coast from Pyrgos to the Turkish frontier, again with the exception of some Mussulman settlements, contains a population which is Greek and fanatic.

Of course, these Greek populations, which, by the way, suffered so dreadfully in August of 1906, when Anchialos was burned to the ground, are lost forever to Greece. But their loss confirms what I have said before, that in the case of Greece versus Bulgaria, it is Greece that has a right to complain of the non-application of the principle of nationality.

#### IV.

The conclusion is obvious. Bulgaria has no ground for complaint. Her conduct in 1915-1918 deserves very severe punishment. She has escaped, however, practically unscathed. In spite of the fact that Greece has twice defeated Bulgaria, more Greeks will be included in Bulgaria than Bulgarians in Greece.

It is true that the Bulgaria of tomorrow will be smaller than Roumania, Serbia or Greece. But no injustice is done, the Bulgarians being numerically smaller than any other Christian Balkan people. The entire Bulgarian race consists of from four and a half to five millions, whereas the Roumanian race numbers fifteen millions, the Serbian twelve, and the Greek eight-and-a-half millions.

With the break-up of Turkey and Austria, Greece and Serbia obtain territorial enlargements proportionate to the numbers of their respective peoples. Bulgaria will become a third-rate state in the Near East. This is a situation

which she has not as yet been able to stomach. Every satisfaction given to the just claims of the other Christian Balkan States appears to Bulgaria as an injustice done to her. Hence, the treacherous attacks of 1913 and 1915. As an offsetting circumstance, however, it should be noticed here that the "boundless ambition" of Bulgaria, which for the last forty years has been the stumbling block to a Balkan Federation, is partly the outcome of Russian diplomacy. The Czars would have won immortal glory and permanent influence, if they had aimed at the liberation of all the Eastern Christian races. But the blind Russian autocracy, indifferent to moral influence, sought territorial expansion, and especially Constantinople. It was suspicious both of the Serbs and of the Greeks, peoples comparatively numerous, who had shown their spirit of independence by continual uprisings against the Turks.

Hence, the Treaty of San Stephano created an exaggerated Bulgaria, at the expense of the other Christians in the Balkans.

Beaconsfield and Bismarck, instead of righting this wrong, endeavored only to save the Sultan. That is why both the Treaties of San Stephano and of Berlin have been styled great political crimes. Nearly all the Bulgarians were emancipated, while only a small portion of the Greek and Serbian races were made free. And thus, for many decades, although the Bulgarian race is equal to one-half the Greek race, and to one-third the Serbian, the Bulgarian Kingdom was nearly double that of Greece, as well as of Serbia.

Now, if we want justice and peace to reign in the Balkans, Sofia must be made to understand that the traditions of Russian and Austrian diplomacy have been wiped out, and that the Great Democratic nations cannot befriend Bulgaria at the expense of the legitimate rights of their Balkan allies.

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